

SOUTH AFRICA'S UNION COINAGE.

BY J. CORDINER.

1923 is a significant date to the collector of the South African series. In June of that year the first coins to be struck in South Africa rolled off the minting presses since the fall of President Kruger's Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek in 1902.

The events leading up to this new coinage can be traced back to 1910 when the Australian Commonwealth adopted a coinage on the £ s. d. system. Despite the initial interest this caused in the Union Parliament more urgent matters carried the day. With the more settled political and economic situation in Southern Africa following the occupation of the former German East African colonies, attention once more focused on the coinage question. In 1919 and 1922 provision was made for the setting up of a branch mint as stipulated under the British Coinage Act of 1870.

A full series of coins, ranging from the sovereign to farthing, but minus the crown were issued in 1923. Bertram MacKenna's "Colonial" bust of King George in coronation robes graces the obverse of the silver, (80% pure) and bronze coinages. The legend reads: GEORGIUS V REX IMPERATOR.

The following reverse designs by the late Kruger Grey were accepted by the government on the recommendation of the mint:

- 2½ Shillings A crowned shield bearing the arms of the four provinces. Date figures each side. Edge reading: SOUTH · AFRICA + ZUID · AFRIKA + 2½ SHILLINGS
2½ +
- 2 Shillings As above but shield uncrowned, and edge reading: + FLORIN +
- 1 Shilling¹ Windswept Hope stdg., supporting anchor, enclosed by beaded circle; below: I SHILLING I.
- 6 Pence¹ Figure "6" encircled by a wreath of silver leaves.
- 3 Pence¹ As above but "3" replaces "6".
- 1 Penny¹ A Dutch East Indian Merchant ship under sail. : I PENNY I.
- ½ Penny¹ As above but legend reads : ½ PENNY ½.
- 1 Farthing¹ Two heraldic sparrows : ¼ PENNY ¼.

Sovereigns and their halves were struck as proofs in 1923. Some sovereigns were issued for circulation in 1924 but these are now extremely rare. With the return of South Africa and Britain to the gold standard in 1925 the production of gold coins greatly increased. Thus the abundance of South African gold dated 1925 until the termination of the issue in 1932. Half-sovereigns were minted for circulation in 1925 and 1926 only. South African gold struck at the Royal Mint, Pretoria, can be recognised by the letters S.A. which appear on the reverse ground above the date. In 1929 a smaller modified head of the King was introduced, also the reverse was re-engraved. One of the reasons for these changes was an attempt to prevent the "ghost head" which often occurred on the reverse of the issue.

¹ No coins were struck in the following years: Shillings 1925, Sixpences 1928, Ticeys 1925, Pennies 1925, ½ Pennies 1927, and no Farthings in 1925, 1927 and 1929.

In 1925 the first changes appeared on the reverse of the silver issues. Both the tickey and sixpence were completely re-designed. The central theme on these two coins now became the protea, the Union's national flower. The wreath gave way to bundles of fagots, six on the sixpence and three on the tickey. Again Kruger Grey was the capable designer.

Minor changes in the reverse inscription took place on all issues except the florin in 1926 and 1928. In 1931 the Dutch spelling Zuid Afrika was replaced on the coinage by the Afrikaans Suid Afrika.² Once again the lettering used to express the denomination was altered, this time on all coins except the shilling and halfcrown. From 1931 until the death of King George in 1936 there were no further changes.

By far the hardest year to complete in set form is 1931. The scarcest denomination is the tickey of which only 128 specimens were struck, 62 being proofs. There were also some rare farthings issued during this period. The mint records striking 16 in 1926. This makes the mintage figures of the "rare" 1951 British penny look enormous.

Proof sets were sold by the mint at a slight premium for all years except 1924, 1925, 1927, 1928, and 1929.

Between the years 1923 and 1936 approximately one third of the total issue of Kruger coin was returned to and melted by the mint. British coin ceased to be legal tender from 15th January 1933, following Britain's devaluation.

Following the death of George V in January 1936 a new set of obverse dies bearing the effigy of Edward VIII were received at Pretoria. However the treasury heeded the rumours of the impending abdication and postponed the issue.

George VI was crowned in May 1937. A full series of coins from halfcrown to farthing were struck soon after bearing Hugh Paget's uncrowned bust of the King. The obverse reads: GEORGIUS VI REX IMPERATOR. All coins dated 1937 are common with the exception of the farthing which has a mintage of 38,254. In 1938 mintages began a downward trend which continued into 1939. The only shillings and sixpences dated 1939 are proofs. In this year only 30 sets were issued, the lowest number for the reign.

The large influx in the number of foreigners entering the Union following the outbreak of war in 1939 is reflected in the high mintages of coin during the early forties. Proof sets were discontinued until 1943 and no farthings were issued in 1940. During the period 1940 to 1945 minor varieties in the grouping of the date figures can be found on most denominations.

On 1st July 1941 the South African Mint Act became law. The Royal Mint, South African Branch, now became the South African Mint. A major reason for the passing of this Act was the difficulty in maintaining regular trade routes with Britain. All mint employees previously working for the British Government now became responsible to the Union Government.

In 1942 the tin content in the bronze coins was reduced from 30 parts per 1000 to 5 parts. Modern warfare had made tin a scarce commodity. Apart from a slight increase in the number of die cracks on coins struck since 1942 South African engraved dies seem of good quality.

From 1944 the mint output was greatly reduced. Scarce years are 1946-1950 inclusive for the halfcrown, florin and shilling. Apart from the 1949 florin and 1950 shilling the coins mentioned above all have mintages of less than 30,000.

To celebrate the State visit of the King and Queen to South Africa in 1947 a crown piece was struck. The last time a coin of this denomination had been issued

² Both Dutch and Afrikaans reverses occur on the 1931 issue of half-pennies and farthings.

was 1892. The reverse design chosen was Coert Steynberg's "pronking" springbok. This animal is still common on the upper plains of Bechuanaland. The legend reads: + SOUTH AFRICA · 1947 · SUID AFRIKA + 5 SHILLINGS. The total mintage of this coin was 305,600, including 5,600 proofs. As a result of the crown's popularity it was decided to continue the issue annually.

The penny and halfpenny dated 1947 are scarce. Their mintages are 135,279 and 257,903 respectively.

In August 1947 India was granted Independence. The coinage of 1948 reflects this change by omitting "IMPERATOR" from the King's titles which now read: "GEORGIUS SEXTVS REX".

Apart from a 1948 penny with a stop missing after the date I can find no varieties on coins dated 1945 to 1950.

By the mid-century South Africa remained the only Commonwealth country with the exception of Canada to have a silver content of 80% in her coinage. With the world price of silver reaching a new peak the temptation to debase proved too great. In 1951 the silver fineness was reduced to 50%.

Also in 1951 the newly elected Nationalist Government decided it time to topple the priority given to the English language on the coinage. From that date every other denomination commenced with the words "SUID AFRIKA" on the reverse. Thus the crown reads from left: "SUID AFRIKA · 1951 · "SOUTH AFRICA", and the halfcrown as before: "SOUTH AFRICA · 1951 · SUID AFRIKA" a minor but interesting point.

To mark the tercentenary of Johann Van Riebeeck's arrival at the Cape with the first permanent Dutch settlers a new reverse was chosen for the crown. This depicts Van Riebeeck's ship, the *Dromedaris*, entering Table Bay. Table Mountain is in the background with the Dutch East India Company's monogram v o c in the right field. Marion Walgate was the designer. The coin is dated 1952. To complete the proof set a gold pound and half pound were struck. These were the first gold coins to be minted in South Africa since the sovereign issue of 1932. The Springbok of crown fame is depicted on the reverse of both coins. The 1952 set thus became the first to contain eleven denominations. Before the strikings for 1952 had been completed King George VI was dead.

New dies for the coinage of Elizabeth II were copied from a master die of Mary Gillick's effigy of the Queen received from London. The Queen's titles read: ELIZABETH II REGINA. As in 1952 all eleven denominations were struck but dated 1953. The issue of proof gold was reduced to a third of the previous total. 3,000 complete sets and a further 2,000 containing silver and bronze only were sold by the treasury in 1953. To supplement the number of proof crowns available to the public 8,000 "Specially Selected" specimens were minted. "Specially Selected" crowns are known for the years 1948 to 1960 inclusive. Although of excellent quality they lack the mirror-like finish of proofs.

Two scarce coins of the 1954 issue are the crown with a mintage of 17,040 and the halfpenny with a mintage of 100,897 pieces.

The government's decision to decimalize the Unions Coinage was announced on 11th December 1958. In 1959 the Decimal Coinage Act was passed through Parliament. This Act provided for a ten shilling unit known as the rand and equal to 100 cents to replace the Pound Sterling. The date set by the Decimal Coinage Commission for the change over was February 1961.

All silver dated 1959 is scarce except for the florin and tickey. The coin with the lowest mintage was the crown, only 6,139 pieces were struck making this coin the scarcest South African crown since the famous "error" double shaft variety of 1892. To mark the Union's fiftieth anniversary a special design was chosen for the 1960 crown. Parliament buildings are depicted on the obverse with the date "1910" above

and "1960" below. Kruger Gray's coat of arms as found on the florin graces the reverse of the crown. 421,624 pieces were struck.

Scarce issues for 1960 are the halfcrown and tickey. The combined mintage of these coins is less than 40,000 pieces. The 1960 strikings are the last to include the Queen's effigy as well as bringing the sterling series to a close.

On 31st May 1961, fifty one years after the declaration of Union status, South Africa became a Republic.